

1999 Annual Report Executive Summary

Clare County Enterprise Community

Ever since January 11, 1999 when Clare County learned it was designated as an Enterprise Community, there has been constant forward motion. Some minor set backs have occurred, but none that could stop the positive forward movement of this dedicated group who sees better days ahead for Clare County. The unique partnership that exists among the Clare County Enterprise Community, Michigan State University and the Clare County Board of Commissioners has really helped to maintain stability during the difficult times. Probably the most disappointing of these times was the early fall when the group was unsuccessful in their attempt to hire an executive director. Because of the extensive involvement and knowledge of Clare County Extension Director Hal Hudson, the movement continued until another search could be completed and an executive director hired. The job was offered to Edward Kerr who began in the role of Clare County Enterprise Community Executive Director on January 5, 2000.

The most significant accomplishment is the progress made on Benchmark 12.2: Establish Clare County Community Farmers Market. A proposal was prepared and submitted to the Dunlap Leadership Foundation, asking for support of the costs associated with the leadership activities necessary to attack this benchmark. In November 1999, Tom Guthrie, Executive Director of Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems, notified the group they had been awarded a grant of \$23,175 to proceed with the Farmers Market project. During December 1999, Tom Guthrie discussed with the benchmark committee the possibility of submitting a RBEG grant to help support the feasibility study/business plan, and a Michigan Department of Agriculture Export Market Development Assistance Grant to help support web-based international marketing of products. This has created a very positive atmosphere and helped to keep community support and involvement at a high level.

From the weekly reports of the past year (1999), it is obvious that activities and meetings related to the Enterprise Community in general, as well as those dealing directly with benchmarks, have been well attended. When the original grass roots group learned they were designated a High Performing Enterprise Community, the level of community involvement rose to an even higher level. The EC Board of Directors views no idea as a bad one. Each idea brought to the group is treated with equal consideration. Another indicator of high community participation is the number of benchmark champions who are willing to attend workshops and training sessions no matter the location.

Many relationships have been established throughout the process over this past year. Several business leaders who have been involved saw the need for Clare County to market itself on a regional basis. They recognized that for the past 30 years each community within Clare County has been trying to market itself, and has not been very effective. As an example, Clare County has been above the national rate of unemployment each month since 1970. The most significant partnership established in the past year was with Middle Michigan Development Corporation. MMDC is a nonprofit corporation located in a neighboring county, dedicated to the purpose of community and economic development. Their focus is manufacturing, and they are interested in retaining the manufactures we have, as well as locating new ones to the region. Currently they are completing a marketing study, which will lead to a marketing plan for Clare and Isabella Counties.

The key to success for this group has been the democratic manner by which business is conducted. As was mentioned earlier in this summary, the Board of Directors views no idea as a bad one. When requests for assistance come to the Enterprise Community, they are reviewed very thoroughly to see

which benchmark they might fall under. Because of the breadth of applications, there are few requests that cannot be easily associated with one of the benchmarks.